Navigating the Journey through Trauma and Loss with Narradrama

BY PAM PAULSON, MA, LMFT, RDT, NT

"Joy is the most vulnerable emotion." Brene Brown

Foreboding Joy – Rehearsing tragedy

Change is a constant in life –

Things are not going to stay the same

Some losses during COVID 19

- Daily Rhythm
  Uncertainty
- Social Structures and Institutions
- Mobility
- Time with family and friends
- Limited physical touch
- Work and school
- Financial
- Death
- Health

Some gains during COVID 19

More time/New Rhythm

- Self Reflection
  World connection – not alone
- Investing in passions
- Creativity
- Quality time with friends and family
- Finding priorities
- Reaching out to others
- Compassion
- Clarity

Change involves losses and gains

Each person experiences and processes loss and trauma differently

What contributes to how we experience loss and trauma?

- The meaning we attribute to the story
- Judgement
- Support system – Relationships –acceptance, allowing
- Basic sense of self
- Current life situation: Stable or In flux
- Stressors – Unemployment, substance abuse, child abuse, neglect, domestic violence, chronic illness, divorce, mental illness
- Prior loss or trauma
- Planned loss vs Sudden loss
- Talking it out, dreaming it out or contextualizing it.

"Therapists do not assume to know a person's unique experiences of trauma; rather they provide the scaffold for inquiry. The therapeutic position is "decentered and influential." People are the authorities on their lives." Michael White

Strengths in Response to Trauma
50-75%

Resilience - "In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways.

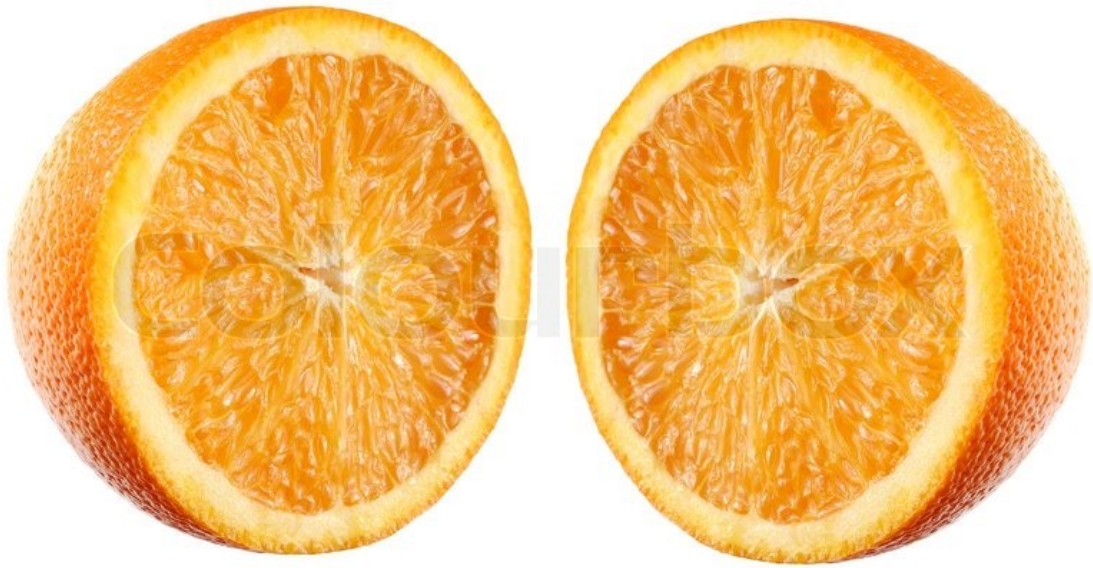
Benefit Finding - The recognition and identification of positive qualities or benefits from negative experiences or adversities, including a variety of chronic illnesses and traumatic events. Other terms that are similar to the concept of benefit finding are posttraumatic growth, stress-related growth , and adversarial growth.
It is believed that benefit finding is closely related to resilience, in which case, the more involved and successful an individual is in the process of benefit finding within a traumatic experience, the greater the likelihood that he or she will achieve increased skills and awareness that are required to develop and promote resilience.

Hardiness -

- Being committed to finding meaningful purpose in life
- The belief that one can influence one's surroundings and the outcome of events
- The belief that one can learn and grow from both positive and negative life experiences

Trauma as an incomplete story

- The story of Trauma is distressing because ½ of the memories are not included
  - The response to the trauma is missing
  - The response to the trauma includes one's values



Trauma and Just Being Human

Self-doubt

Fearful

Shame

Judgemental

Vulnerability

Feeling stuck

Numbing

Denial

Distrusting

Misunderstood

Overwhelmed

What is healing is Resonance instead of affirmation

Catharsis – Greek origins. After seeing a Greek Play

Greek Tragedy –if you saw it and it moved you, changed your perspective on your own history, awakened values that you had forsaken, awaken ideas about how you might proceed in life, suddenly you had a particular desire to have a conversation with a family member.

Trauma

Trauma takes away our ability to play, imagine, and have hope

Experiencing Trauma overwhelms the ordinary human adaptations of life, and it produces immediate responses of helplessness, fear, loss of control, and threat of annihilation.

Is the Traumatic Experience still Alive?

1. Can they talk about it?
2. Does it still seem recent?
3. Do nebulous reminders trigger flashbacks?
    1. Vet walking down center of street
    2. Woman fearful of bearded men

"Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives."

American Psychological Association

Types of Trauma

VICARIOUS TRAUMA

WHEN THERE IS AN EMPATHIC ENGAGEMENT WITH TRAUMATIZED PEOPLE

EXAMPLES: THERAPISTS, CRISIS COUNSELORS, NURSES, PHYSICIANS, SOCIAL WORKERS, CLERGY, HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS, JOURNALISTS, POLICE, FIREMEN, EMERGENCY AND DISASTER WORKERS

DEVELOPMENTAL TRAUMA

RESULTS FROM EXPOSURE OF A CHILD OR ADOLESCENT TO ADVERSE CONDITIONS IN THEIR ENVIRONMENT PREVENTING THE OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR NERVOUS SYSTEM WHICH IS UNDER DEVELOPMENT.

EXAMPLES: EMOTIONAL OR PHYSICAL NEGLECT, VERBAL OR PHYSICAL ABUSE, CHAOTIC HOME ENVIRONMENT, SUBSTANCE ABUSE, PROLONGED ILLNESSES, ABANDONMENT

SHOCK TRAUMA

A SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED HORRIFYING EVENT

EXAMPLES: MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS, PLANE CRASHES (OR NEAR), PHYSICAL INJURIES, SEXUAL ABUSE, VIOLENCE, WAR, TERRORISM, POLITICAL PERSECUTION, NATURAL DISASTERS, EMERGENCY MEDICAL PROCEDURES, MISCARRIAGES, TERMINAL ILLNESS DIAGNOSIS, TRAUMATIC GRIEF OR SEPARATION.

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

RESULT OF EITHER SHOCK TRAUMA AND/OR DEVELOPMENTAL TRAUMA.

DSM-5 REVISION (2013), RECLASSIFIED AS A "TRAUMA AND STRESSOR-RELATED DISORDERS" CHANGED FROM ANXIETY DISORDER

Vicarious trauma – Michael White

- Burn out
  - The more we become the center, the more vulnerable we are.
  - Belief that our work depends on our own strength and resources.
  - If we are burned out we need to take a break and reflect, look back on our work and be curious about what contributes to the burn out.
  - The incomplete part of the trauma story is felt and picked up by the therapist

3 Stages of Trauma Healing with Narradrama

- 1. Creating safety
  - Creating a safe environment – Drawing, Physicalize, Body
  - Mindfulness
  - Meditation – Imaginal work
  - Deep Breathing
- 2. Remembrance and Mourning
  - Telling your story – 3 phases –honoring psychological pain and emotional distress
  - Externalizing – using Metaphors (i.e. Hero, Victim and Perpetrator, Seed, Butterfly, Phoenix rising, panning for gold)
  - Identifying Strengths and Values
  - Unique Outcomes
  - Bubbles of Trauma
  - Honoring losses through ritual
- 3. Reconnecting and Integrating – Creating Meaning.
  - Restorying – leading to values – legacy of giving back
  - Mapping

Creating my Island of Safety

- Anchoring in the body
- Anchoring in the imagination
- Creating our Safe Island
  - Name your Island
  - What colors
  - What smells
  - What sounds
  - What tastes
  - How does your body feel here
  - Create a sound and movement representing your Island

"Healing is about the environment we create." Peter Levine

Creating a Safe Place – Anchors of Safety
feeling calm, safe and grounded

Body Calming Techniques
- Creative exercises that identify inner islands of safety within the body
- Body postures or movements to come back to.
- Tapping
- Squeezing

Provide Tools of Safety
- Self soothing – Object from Childhood

Grounded: Rooted in the present moment
- Helps you understand that the traumatic event happened in the past.

Creating and expanding the Safety Island
Build over time

- Begin with the body, the non verbal
  - Self hug, tapping, hand placement, breathing
  - Mindfulness meditation
  - Guided meditation – create a safe imaginal place or identify a safe place in your body
- Create a space in the room that represents your safe place – notice places you feel safe
- Write down words that you associate with a sense of safety.
- Places you've been, people, colors, a place in your house, something from childhood, a comfy blanket, pillow, photo, etc., sounds, music
- Expand each item of your list through free association. Include all of your senses
- Notice how you feel in your body while you explore and expand your list – common sensations are warmth in the chest, belly, longer exhale, softer face
- Safe relationships – noticing, identify qualities important to you that make it safe for you.

Bessel van der Kolk
Childhood Trauma Characteristics

1. Attention problems – difficulty holding attention, inability to filter things out.

2. Affect Regulation – Emotions give us good information about what to do. Emotions – Highjacked - large and extreme or too quiet. Develop chronic adaptations – to calm down – drugs

3. Relationship problems
    a. Don't feel safe, people will hurt me.
    b. Protecting against being hurt by: being aggressive, overly compliant, distant – if I stand up for myself I will be hurt.

"You can Discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation." Plato

Play is so healing, as is laughter and joy. Playing allows us to take risks when we feel that we are too fragile to step into the world and take on new challenges.

Standing Tall

Robert Landy

4th Grade Class in NYC
following 911

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-HAsTr2LO4

Standing Tall

Playful warm ups – Seed to standing tall

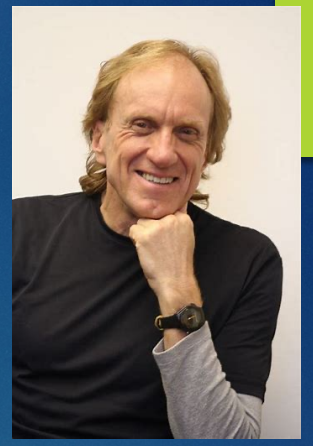
Exploring Trauma Through Metaphor – Victim, Perpetrator, Hero

Creating scenes from Metaphor as a bridge to their experiences.

Telling their stories

Creating a group presentation

Children, Trauma and Consequences - Michael White



1. *We do not want to contribute to childrens identities becoming defined by trauma.*

2. *We want to work with young people to find a different territory of identity to stand in – to understand the consequences of trauma in their life.*

1. *Conversations to draw out avenues –small places, like islands to become archipelagos and then larger territories of safety upon which to stand. From this position of safety, traumatic memory may be restored.*

2. *No one is a passive recipient to trauma. Responses are often rendered invisible or diminished.*

3. *Responses are founded on what someone gives value to as well as a person's knowledges and skills of living.*

4. *Story development is bringing a subordinate storyline out of shadows… as it becomes more richly described, an account emerges of what a person values in life, leading to a foundation for action.*

5. *Reauthoring conversations bring forth identity conclusions defined by one's purposes, intentions, hopes & dreams, preferred initiatives and actions for life rather than by the account of trauma.*

Activity

- Group 1: Warm Up
- Group 2: Metaphorical/Symbolic exercise
- Group 3
- Healing Ritual

The Narradrama Lens

1. CREATE SAFE SPACE – BODY, LIVING SPACE, IMAGINAL – ON-GOING ISLANDS OF SAFETY
2. LISTEN TO THE STORY. THE NEGATIVE, TRAUMA STORY IS PRIVILEGED – WE BEGIN WITH THE "PROBLEM SATURATED" STORY – HONORING IT
3. WE LOOK FOR EXCEPTIONS (UNIQUE OUTCOMES)TO THE "PROBLEM SATURATED STORY" AND AMPLIFY.
4. TRAUMA IS AN EXPERIENCE NOT AN IDENTITY. EXTERNALIZE AN IMPACT OF THE PROBLEM – NAME IT, EXPLORE LANDSCAPE OF EFFECTS– WHAT STRENGTHS AND WEAKENS, THE IMPACT (DOUBLE DESCRIPTIONS, INTERVIEWING PROBLEM) (IE. SHUT DOWN, FEAR, ANGER, SADNESS,
5. EXPLORE PREFERRED RELATIONSHIP TO THE PROBLEM
6. LOOK FOR RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT THE PREFERRED RELATIONSHIP
7. CREATIVELY EXPLORE AND EMBODY PROCESS(SCENES, MASKS, POETRY, COLLAGE, MUSIC, MOVEMENT, ETC)
8. CREATE STORY OF THE JOURNEY. RESTORYING.
9. CREATE A RITUAL TO HONOR PROCESS AND DESIRED RELATIONSHIP TO PROBLEM

Negative Consequences of the Impact of Trauma

Narratives developed

Low self-esteem
Severe depression, anxiety, fear, rage, confusion
Physically illness – immune system compromised, autoimmune
Addictions
Poor impulse control
Long term use of medications
Isolated,
Feel disembodied
Guilt and shame
Hyperalert, hypervigilant
Alexithymia
Loss of ability to play – mental flexibility
Loss of imagination - can't imagine a better future
PTSD
Pain becomes sole source of meaning
Difficulty sleeping
Difficulty finding stable, trusting relationships
Violence – may lead to arrests or incarceration
Tolerance for violence and abuse
Earlier death

Problem Saturated Story

An experience not an Identity

Positive Consequences of Dealing with Trauma

Restorying

Healthy self-esteem
Having an inner sense of value and purpose
More spontaneous - playful
Open and curious
Ability to feel body sensations and trust them
Ability to verbalize emotions connected to body
Improved health
Living in the present
Feeling safe in ones own body – making friends with ones own body
Find healthy coping mechanisms
Ability to form trusting, safe relationships
Accepting the joys and sorrows of life
Sense of connection and community – feeling valuable and cared about
Inner and outer resources
Rediscovering strengths
Confidence – gaining skills
Aliveness
Sense of gratitude
Hope

Uncovering hidden strengths and capacities

Trauma statistics

1 in 5 Americans were molested as children

1 in 3 couples engage in physical violence

1 in 8 witnessed their mother being hit

¼ of us grew up with alcoholic relatives

Traumatized children have asthma 50 times more often than non-traumatized children

18 Veterans commit Suicide Every Day - - a Total of 6,552 Veterans Each Year

At least two thirds of the general population have experienced a significant traumatic event in their lives

9% will have PTSD at some point in their lives.

26% of children in the United States will witness or experience a traumatic event before they turn four.

More than **13%** of children reported being physically bullied, while more than 1 in 3 said they had been emotionally bullied.

Young children exposed to five or more significant adverse experiences in the first three years of childhood face a **76%** likelihood of having one or more delays in their language, emotional or brain development.

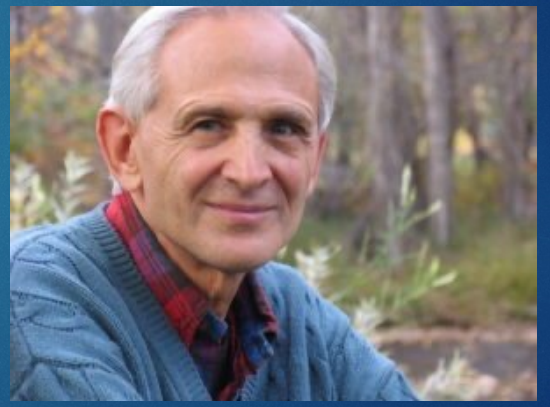
Bessel Van Der Kolk

Professor of psychiatry at Boston University School of Medicine
Medical director of the Trauma Center in Boston
Co-director of the Complex Trauma Treatment Network
"The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma"
.

"Instead of what's wrong with you….
What happened to you?
And how is that still effecting your life?"

"People get better when they can bear knowing what they know and feeling what they feel."

Peter Levine, PhD



Developer of Somatic Experiencing®

He is also the bestselling author of *Waking the Tiger*

Peter is the founder of the Foundation for Human Enrichment, based out of Boulder, Colorado.

"Trauma is the antithesis of empowerment."

"Trauma is blocked energy."

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7zAsealyFA

Treatment for survivors of trauma

SOMATIC EXPERIENCING – PETER LEVINE

EQUESTRIAN SOMATIC THERAPIES – THE MEADOWS -*COLLEEN DERANGO AND BUDDY ULDRICKSON*

AUTHENTIC MOVEMENT

YOGA

EMDR

NEUROFEEDBACK

MINDFULNESS

COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR THERAPY

STORY TELLING IN A GROUP OF SURVIVORS

MUSIC THERAPY – INSTRUMENTS AND VOICE

CREATIVE ART THERAPIES – ART THERAPY, DRAMA THERAPY, NARRADRAMA, DANCE THERAPY, PSYCHODRAMA, SAND TRAY

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mspyhs96LxY

Yoga - Bessel van der Kolk

In the studies we did involving neuroimaging of the brain before and after regular yoga practice, we were able to show that the areas of the brain involving self-awareness get activated by doing yoga, and those are the areas that get locked out by trauma and that are needed in order to heal it.

Neurofeedback can affect brain activation patterns—it can actually change brain waves, and can help to make people's brains quieter and more attentive.

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)

The practice of EMDR appears to integrate traumatic memories so they become stories about something that happened a long time ago, but are no longer lived in the present.

Somatic Experiencing – Peter Levine

Somatic experiencing focuses not on the horror of the event; rather it is on *completion* of the body's incomplete responses to protect and defend itself and others.

By releasing held tension, paying attention to the present, and regulating the nervous system, a somatic approach helps ease the feelings of helplessness, fear, arousal, and disconnection that can arise for trauma.

The Brain and Trauma

Primitive Brain – Freeze- shuts down to conserve energy

Reptilian Brain – Mobilizes – Fight or Flight

Mammalian Brain – Limbic System – Emotions, memories, habits, social engagement – seeks safety in group affiliation

Neocortex – Language, abstact thought, imagination – Shuts down during trauma - one reason why many people cannot completely put what happened to them in words.

Medial prefrontal cortex – shuts down during stress - Experience of present moment

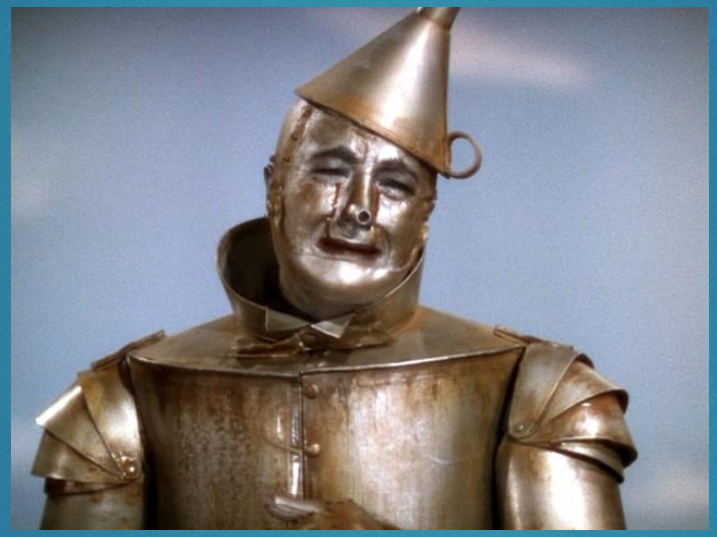
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGHR0xdCIjs Impala shaking

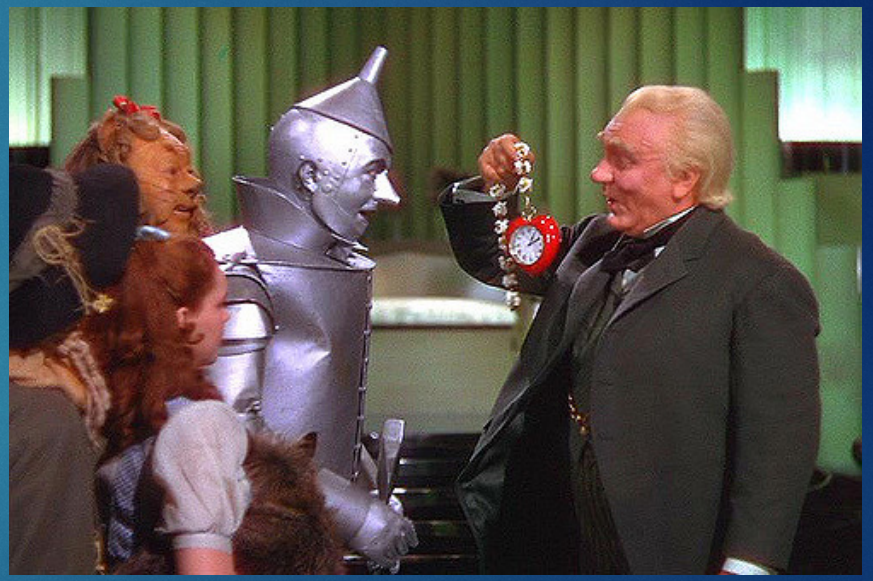
The advantages of the freeze response : Using less energy, so if the animal is abandoned by the predator, it still has energy to escape. Many predators are stimulated by movement and have greater difficulty detecting nonmoving prey. With the freezing response, predators lose interest, or another sound or movement could distract them leaving their prey untouched.

Survival

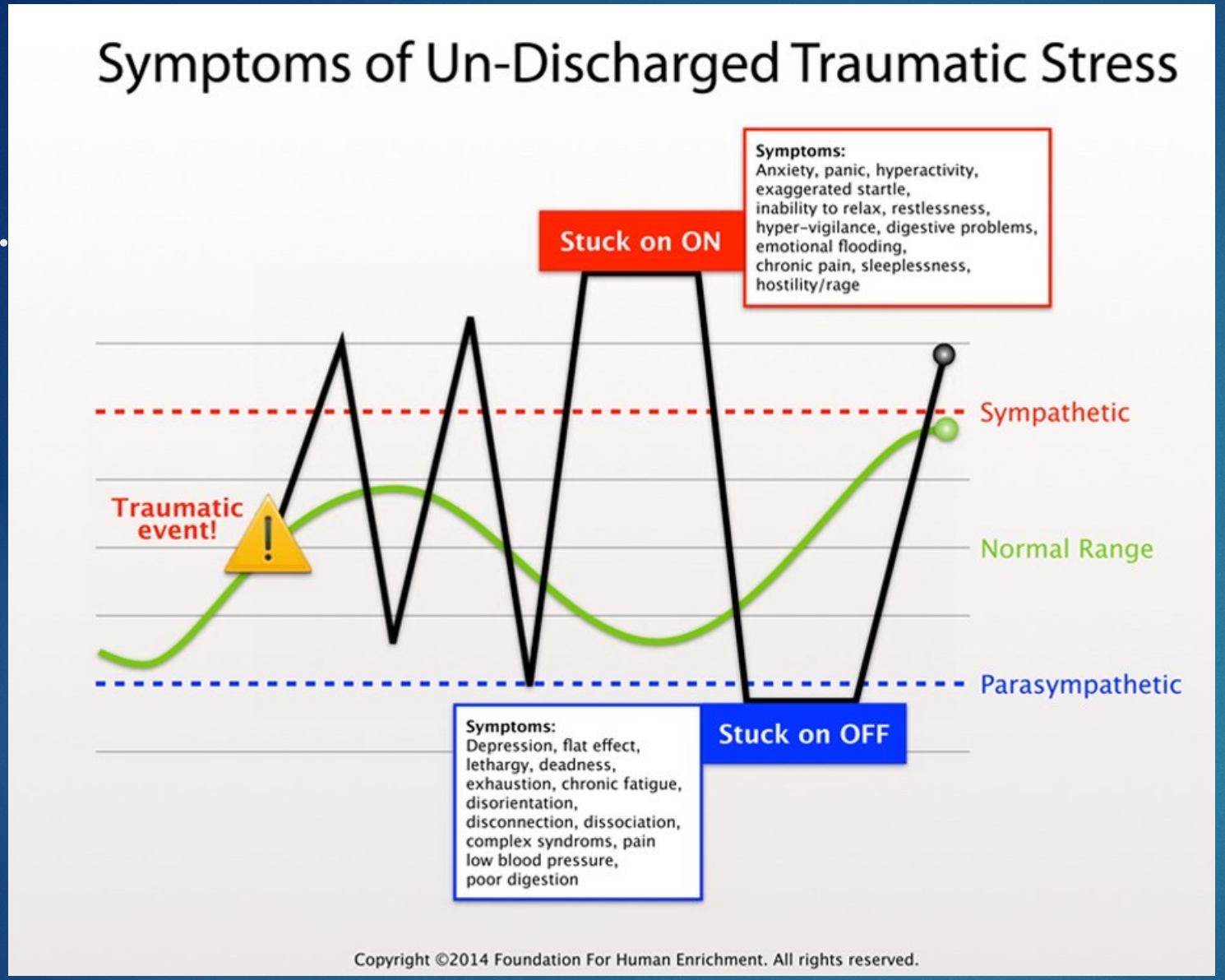
Reptilian Brain – Fight - Flight

Mammalian Brain – Emotions, memories, habits - decisions



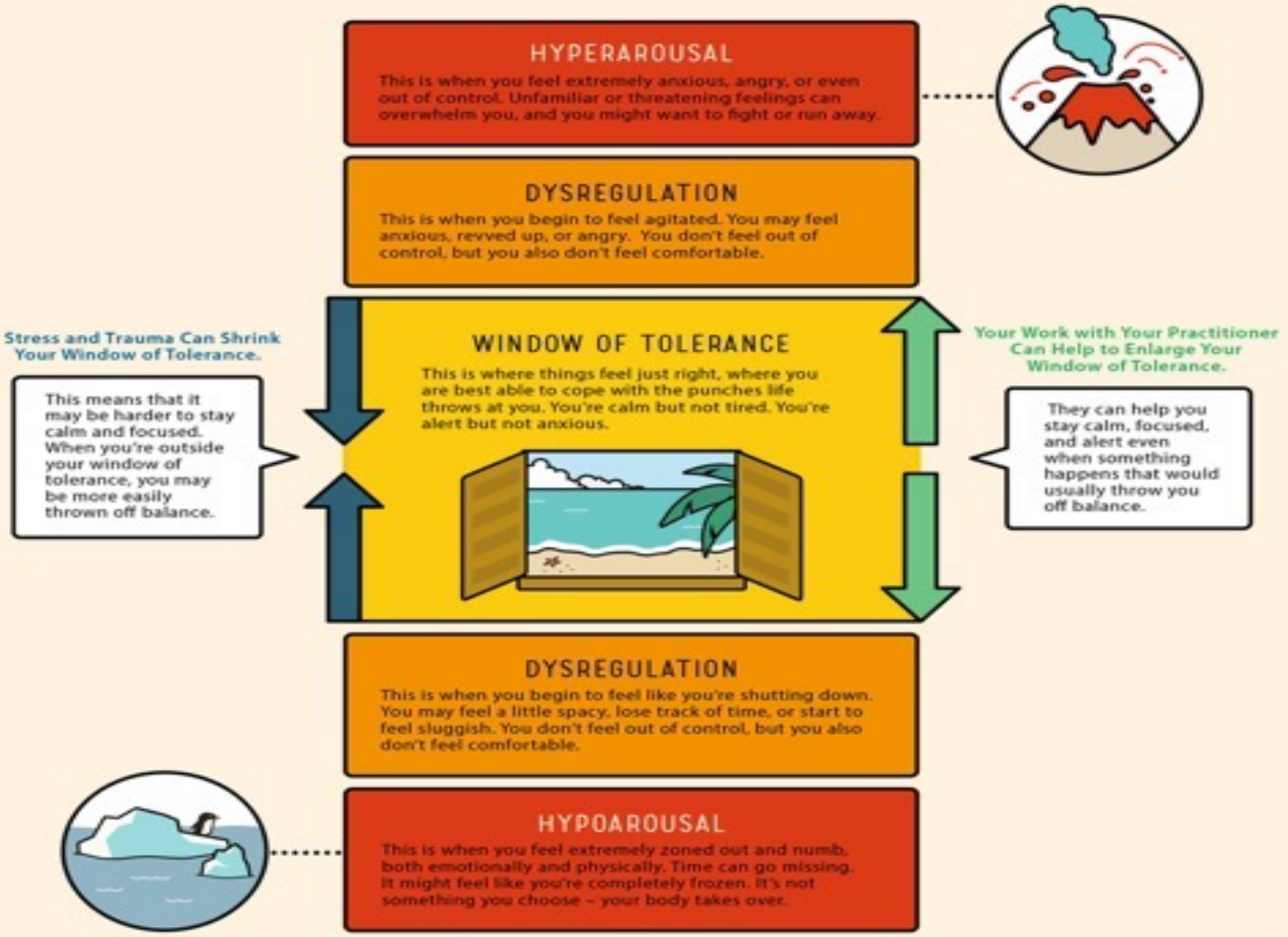


The Neocortex – language, abstract thought, imagination, consciousness, rationalizes



There is a compulsion or attracting force towards repetition after a traumatic experience.

How Trauma Can Affect Your Window of Tolerance


HYPERAROUSAL
This is when you feel extremely anxious, angry, or even out of control. Unfamiliar or threatening feelings can overwhelm you, and you might want to fight or run away.
DYSREGULATION
This is when you begin to feel agitated. You may feel anxious, revved up, or angry. You don't feel out of control, but you also don't feel comfortable.
Stress and Trauma Can Shrink Your Window of Tolerance.
This means that it may be harder to stay calm and focused. When you're outside your window of tolerance, you may be more easily thrown off balance.
WINDOW OF TOLERANCE
This is where things feel just right, where you are best able to cope with the punches life throws at you. You're calm but not tired. You're alert but not anxious.
Your Work with Your Practitioner Can Help to Enlarge Your Window of Tolerance.
They can help you stay calm, focused, and alert even when something happens that would usually throw you off balance.
DYSREGULATION
This is when you begin to feel like you're shutting down. You may feel a little spacy, lose track of time, or start to feel sluggish. You don't feel out of control, but you also don't feel comfortable.
HYPOAROUSAL
This is when you feel extremely zoned out and numb, both emotionally and physically. Time can go missing. It might feel like you're completely frozen. It's not something you choose – your body takes over.
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The Silent Story

In Threes

The Story Teller– Express your journey in movement.
You can use music.

The Witnesses –
How you are witnessing

1. The child – beginners mind, the wisdom of not knowing and not needing to know. Open, curious.
2. Clear the mechanism.
3. Be in the location and environment of your Island.

When Story Teller is finished the witnesses will take 5 minutes to draw a response – what resonates with you?

The Story Teller can write or draw about their experience.

Stretch Break

Authentic Movement

Authentic Movement is an expressive improvisational movement practice that allows a group of participants a type of free association of the body. It was started by Mary Starks Whitehouse in the 1950s as "movement in depth".

- Authentic movement is a profoundly simple form in which a mover moves with eyes closed in the presence of a witness. At its core, Authentic Movement is about trusting the innate wisdom of the body to lead us toward healing and the development of conscious presence.
- In the practice of Authentic Movement, the body is the gateway of awareness itself. It informs the creative process, contemplative practice, and healing on all levels.

Moving first – drawing or writing – sharing experience (track movement, feelings, thoughts), witnessing (recall), back to mover to reflect on witnessing

- Mover
- Witness
- Recall
- Witnessing
- Gesture Circle
- Dyads, Breathing Circle

"The way to healing lies in finding a connection between body and soul. Soul needs body as much as body needs soul. Each is out of context without the other, an abandoned fragment of what it is." Marion Woodman

Somatic Experiencing with Peter Levine working with PTSD Veteran

Peter Levine Secret to Releasing Trauma from the Body - PTSD

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s1RnTipiU_Q

Expanded Version 24 minutes

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjeJC86RBgE

Evaluations

Quiz

1. Name the 4 Different Types of Trauma?

2 Name two Narradrama Techniques used in working with Trauma

3. Name 2 Negative Consequences of Trauma

4. Name 2 Positive Consequences of working therapeutically with trauma

5. Name the 3 Stages of Healing Trauma

Quiz

1. 4 Different Types of Trauma?
Vicarious
Developmental
Shock
PTSD

2 Narradrama Techniques used in working with Trauma

Honoring the problem saturated story
Mapping the influences of the trauma
Externalization
Uncovering Strengths
Unique Outcomes
Restorying - Making meaning

Quiz

3. Name 2 Negative Consequences of Trauma

Low self-esteem
Severe depression, anxiety, fear, rage, confusion
Physically illness – immune system compromised, autoimmune
Addictions
Poor impulse control
Long term use of medications
Isolated,
Feel disembodied
Guilt and shame
Hyperalert, hypervigilant
Alexithymia
Loss of ability to play – mental flexibility
Loss of imagination - can't imagine a better future
PTSD
Pain becomes sole source of meaning
Difficulty sleeping
Difficulty finding stable, trusting relationships
Violence – may lead to arrests or incarceration
Tolerance for violence and abuse
Earlier death

Quiz

4. 2 Positive Consequences of working therapeutically with trauma

Healthy self-esteem
Having an inner sense of value and purpose
More spontaneous - playful
Open and curious
Ability to feel body sensations and trust them
Ability to verbalize emotions connected to body
Improved health
Living in the present
Feeling safe in ones own body – making friends with ones own body
Find healthy coping mechanisms
Ability to form trusting, safe relationships
Accepting the joys and sorrows of life
Sense of connection and community – feeling valuable and cared about
Inner and outer resources
Rediscovering strengths
Confidence – gaining skills
Aliveness
Sense of gratitude
Hope

Quiz

5. Name the 3 Stages of Healing Trauma

    1. Creating safety
    2. Remembrance and Mourning
    3. Reconnecting and Integrating – Creating Meaning.

Life is Beautiful clip

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ITSqc1UnLU

A threat can be neutralized for an infant or child if a smiling mother comes to the rescue. . If there is support, the response may be in the way of social engagement strategies (smiling, vocal tones, facial gestures, verbal communication).